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ABSTRACT

This paper describes "Smena," a Specialist Children's and Young People's Sport School of Olympic Reserves, located in Leningrad, which trains elite young soccer players. Information is given on: (1) the facilities of the school; (2) the schools' long-range individual and team goals; (3) instructional methods and hours; (4) the responsibilities of the coaches; and (5) admission procedures. Appended tables offer information on predicted achievement of players and teams from Smena; calendar division of training periods; distribution of training hours for students; typical weekly timetable for a coach; selection criteria for students; and a typical daily timetable for a student. (JD)

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SMENA: CASE STUDY OF A SOVIET SPORT SCHOOL FOR ELITE YOUNG ATHLETES

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Soviet Sport Schools

Opportunities for advanced sport training in the Soviet Union are provided primarily by the sport school system. Soviet sport schools, in contrast to what the name suggests are the equivalent of an American athletic club. Sport schools are staffed by full time sport administrators and coaches, and students participating in sport school programs attend local public schools for their formal education.

There are three types of sport school. Children's and Young People's Sport Schools usually offer two or three different sport sections. Children who enter the school participate in only one sport but must share the facilities with other sport users. In contrast, Specialist Children's and Young People's Sport Schools of Olympic Reserves offer training in only one sport and are often housed in purpose-built facilities. The majority of elite Soviet athletes train in one of these two facilities until graduating from school at age 18. Those who remain elite athletes at this age (and this depends to a great extent on the nature of their sport specialization) will then usually transfer to the third type of sport school - a School of Higher Sport Mastery. Smena, the sport school examined in this study is a Specialist Children's Sport School of Olympic Reserves.

Smena: Background Information

Smena (which roughly translated means "successors") is located in a north-eastern region of Leningrad (pop. approx. 5 million). The school specializes in soccer which is one of the most popular sports in the Soviet Union. The city of Leningrad is geographically located approximately opposite Anchorage Alaska, and experiences similar climatic conditions. Consequently, outside soccer training is only possible from about April to September. Smena was constructed about 15 years ago by the Ministry of Education.

Facilities

Smena has two identical sport halls each approximately equal to 1/4 of a soccer field. Separating the two halls is the main entrance hall, locker rooms, a cafeteria, medical room, small swimming pool and sauna, and library. On the second floor are administrative offices, a staff locker room and lounge, a lecture room, a weight training room, and two gymnasiums. The third floor includes rooms for overnight accommodation of three visiting teams, classrooms, and a recreation area. Few sport schools in the Soviet Union, regardless of specialization enjoy comparable facilities. Outside, 5 soccer fields were under construction (in 1981) together with a small stadium that would include dressing rooms. Smena is generally acknowledged to be a model sport school and frequently referred to in the press.

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Planning

One of the distinctive features of Soviet sport organization is the government requirement that all sport schools complete five year plans based on the predicted achievements of their athletes. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate individual and team goals set by the staff of Smena during 1981-85.

The Smena approach to achieving these goals models the type of program expected in all Soviet sport schools. As illustrated in Table 3 the year is divided into three training periods, which correspond to dates in the calendar of competition for soccer.

Additional planning divides the training year into 52, six day weeks, or 312 training days. Within this time frame the coaches are expected to plan and conduct training sessions that will cover the topics listed in Table 4, in the hours prescribed for each topic.

For each topic and at every age level Soviet coaches are expected to follow a specified number of instructional hours. Only now, does the individual coach begin to design sessions that will meet these requirements. Training plans must be written and available for review by school administrators or inspectors from the local government sport committee.

Sport School Coaches

The Smena coaching staff included 18 full time soccer coaches, a track and field coach, and an acrobatics coach (the latter two coaches were employed to improve general conditioning). A 4 year college degree specializing in soccer coaching is expected for most coaching positions, although some exceptions are made for individuals with substantial playing experience in a major league team. A sample schedule of one of the coaches is illustrated in Table 5.

Coaches are assigned to work 6 days a week, however, as shown in Table 5 the intensity of their schedule varies from day to day. During the long breaks between morning and late afternoon training sessions they are expected to make regular visits to the nearby public school to consult with teachers on the academic progress of their athletes.

Promotion to a higher coaching level (there are three levels) is dependent on the progress of the coach's athletes. At the beginning of each year the school administrators set specific performance goals. For example, a realistic goal for a coach responsible for a senior group might be to train two players good enough for selection to a league team. For a coach working with younger players the goal might be to prepare the players to meet the demands of the next sport ranking.

Research and Practice

In addition to training their athletes Smena coaches are expected to maintain an interest in, and contribute to the theory of their sport. During the year they are required to investigate and present a paper on a training or coaching topic. Two of Smena's staff, known as methodologists, were responsible for collecting the latest published information and disseminating it to the other coaches. Applied research projects using the athletes as subjects, were conducted by staff and graduate students from

the Lesgaft Institute of Physical Culture and the Leningrad Research Institute for Physical Culture.

Recruitment and Selection

The quality of all sport school programs is greatly dependent on the effectiveness of their methods of recruitment and selection. One of the disadvantages that soccer sport schools face is a smaller pool of talent from which to draw because other sports are able to select younger children. For example, in gymnastics training may begin with children as young as 5. These children will no longer be available by the time soccer coaches begin their recruiting efforts. Coaches are highly motivated to find children with high sport potential because of the direct relationship between an athlete's success and the coach's personal advancement. Consequently, coaches will visit preschools-schools, public schools, and local sport competitions in the search for talent.

Twice each year, in May and September, Smena invites all Leningrad children to try out for a place in the school. During the two weeks of trials 1,000-1,500 children are tested and approximately 10% invited to join the school. Selection is based on the children's performance on a series of practical tests. These tests and the performance expectations are shown in Table 6.

Specialist Soccer Classes

Smena was one of the first schools to introduce the concept of the sports specialist class into its program. For many years, talented Soviet youngsters in music, science, and languages had been grouped together in special classes within the public school. The schedule of these classes was designed to be responsive to the additional time demands imposed by the children's specialization. The introduction of sport specialist classes brought athletes together in one class and permitted the design of a new training schedule. Table 7 illustrates a typical daily timetable for a soccer player included in a specialist class.

The organization and administration of specialist classes for selected Smena athletes demands close cooperation between Smena coaches and teachers in the public schools willing to work with classes composed entirely of athletes. Through the formation of specialist classes it has been possible to double the number of daily training sessions for the soccer players as well as to place them in an environment in which their academic progress can be closely monitored. Before inclusion in a sport specialist class each athlete's ability is carefully evaluated to assess his ability to cope with the intensified academic and athletic demands. Staff from both the sport school and the public school and the student's parents consult to assess whether inclusion in a specialist class is in the student's best interests.

Summary

Smena is a Specialist Children's and Young People's Sport School of Olympic Reserves located in Leningrad that trains elite young soccer players. The facilities of the school are superior to most Soviet sport schools. Five year plans project the school's long range individual and team goals. Instructional hours on designated training topics are officially mandated and coaches must develop written training plans to meet these requirements. The Smena coaching staff includes 18 full time coaches, most of whom have a 4-year degree in soccer coaching. Promotion in coaching is dependent on the performance of the coach's athletes. Admission to Smena is dependent on a student passing a series of physical tests. The most talented young athletes combine to form specialist classes within the local public school.

Table 1
Predicted Achievements of Players from the Smena Soccer School in Representative Teams 1981-1985

Measures	1981 P	1981 A*	1982 P	1982 A	1983 P	1983 A	1984 P	1984 A	1985 P	1985 A
Preparation of Students										
1.USSR Youth Team	1		1		1		1		1	
2.Zenit (higher league)	2		2		2		2		3	
3.Dinamo (lower league)	2		3		3		3		3	
4.Leningrad "Schoolboys"	6		-		7		-		7	
5.Leningrad "Hopefuls"	5		6		6		6		7	
6.Leningrad "Youth"	6		7		7		8		8	
Ranking Awards										
1.1st Adult Rank	5		6		6		6		6	
2.2nd Adult Rank	10		10		12		12		12	
3.1st Youth Rank	30		35		45		40		45	
4.2nd Youth Rank	60		65		70		75		80	
5.3rd Youth Rank	120		135		145		155		170	
6.Instructors	40		45		45		50		60	
7.Soccer Refs.	40		45		45		50		60	

* P = planned and A = achieved. The author was in Leningrad in 1981 and therefore does not have of the statistics for the school's achievements to date.

Table 2
Predicted Achievements of Teams from
the Smena Soccer School 1981-85

Competition	1981		1982		1983		1984		1985	
	P	A*	P	A	P	A	P	A	P	A
1.All-Union Spartakiad of Sch. Children	5		-		4		-		3	
2.Championship of USSR among Specialist Soccer Schools	5		5		4		4		4	
3.Championships of Ministry of Education	4		3		3		3		3	
Championships of Leningrad**										
1.1st Youth Team	6		6		5		5		4	
2.2nd Youth Team	4		4		3		3		3	
3.3rd Youth Team	4		4		3		3		3	
4.1st Children's Team	5		4		4		3		3	
5.2nd Children's Team	5		4		4		4		3	
6.3rd Children's Team	5		4		4		4		3	
7.Beg. Group of School	4		3		3		3		3	
8.Leningrad "Youth" Cup	1		1		1		1		1	
9.Leningrad "Children's" Cup	1		1		1		1		1	

* P = planned and A = achieved. The author was in Leningrad in 1981 and therefore does not have the statistics of the school's achievements to date.

** From 1981 in the Leningrad championships the school teams participated a year younger than their contemporaries.

Table 3
Calendar Division of Soccer
Training Periods

	Period	Dates
1	Preparatory	1 December - 10 May
	(general training)	1 December - 28 February
	(specific training)	1 March - 10 May
2	Competitive	11 May - 12 October
3	Transitional	13 October - 30 November
	(training during this time may be 25-30% of the normal load for members of specialist classes)	

Table 4
Distribution of Training Hours for Students
at the Smena Soccer School 1981-82

	Content of Training	Ages of Students									
		8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18
1	Theoretical study	14	15	18	18	24	32	44	60	70	80
2	General physical preparation	120	90	80	70	60	60	60	60	60	60
3	Specific physical preparation	20	25	30	40	40	50	70	80	90	100
4	Technical preparation	200	205	216	249	248	320	358	442	464	480
5	Tactical preparation	10	15	20	30	35	48	60	100	160	310
6	Training games	44	44	44	60	60	90	90	90	90	90
7	Testing, transitional exams	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	8	8	10
8	Competition	-	-	-	44	44	44	66	66	66	66
9	Refereeing and instructing pract.	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	24	26	36
10	Preparation towards GTO norms	2	2	2	3	3	4	6	6	6	6
	TOTAL HOURS	416	416	416	520	520	624	780	946	1040	1248

Table 5
Typical Weekly Timetable For a Coach at the
Smena Soccer School*

CLASS	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
9th Specialist Class	9-10.30 16.30-18.00 (theory)	9-10.30 16.30-18.00	18.00-19.30	16.30-18	9-10.30 (outside) 18.00-19.30		18.30-20.00 (at Zenit complex)
Preparatory Group 8 year olds			15.00-16.30 (General physical prep)				14.30-15.30 (General physical prep)
Preparatory Group 9 year olds			16.30-18.00 (General physical prep)	15.30-16.30			15.30-16.30 (General physical prep)

*It should be clarified that this is the coach's schedule, not that of the groups. The athletes also train with the track and gymnastic specialists in addition to the hours noted above.

Table 6
Selection Criteria For Young Soccer Players at
Smena Soccer School*

AGE	TESTS											
	Run 15 m			Run 2X10m (zigzag)			Standing long jump (cm)			3 hops on one leg		
	EXCEL	GOOD	SATIS	EXCEL	GOOD	SATIS	EXCEL	GOOD	SATIS	EXCEL	GOOD	SATIS
8.0-8.5	2.9	3.0	3.10	8.4	8.5	8.6	170	160	150	460	440	400
8.5-9.0	2.85	2.95	3.05	8.3	8.4	8.5	175	165	155	480	460	420
9.0-9.5	2.80	2.90	3.0	8.2	8.3	8.4	180	170	160	500	480	440
9.5-10.0	2.75	2.85	2.95	8.1	8.2	8.3	185	175	165	520	500	460
10.0-10.5	2.70	2.80	2.90	8.0	8.1	8.2	190	180	170	540	520	480
10.5-11.0	2.65	2.75	2.85	7.9	8.0	8.1	195	185	175	560	540	500
11.0-11.5	2.60	2.70	2.80	7.8	7.9	8.0	200	190	180	580	560	520
11.5-12.0	2.55	2.65	2.75	7.7	7.8	7.9	205	195	185	600	580	540

*Students need to score not less than 17 points in order to be selected by the school.
Excellent = 5 points, Good = 4 points, and Satisfactory = 3 points.

Table 7
Typical Daily Timetable for Students
at the Smena Soccer School

9:00-10:30	Soccer training at SMENA
10:30-11:00	Breakfast at the public school
11:00-15:30	Lessons
15:30-16:00	Lunch
16:00-18:15	Homework (either at school or at SMENA)
18:30-20:00	Soccer training at SMENA